Nutty but nice

Written by dreamkatcha. Any related videos, as always, can be found on my YouTube channel.

None of this would have been possible without the fantastic resources generously provided by immensely talented emulator authors, and communities such as Hall of Light, Lemon Amiga, Lemon 64, World of Spectrum, Moby Games, World of Longplays and Recorded Amiga Games. Thank you for your tireless dedication to preserving the history of gaming.

If you chucked Rick Dangerous and Bubble Bobble in a blender... you'd end up with a gory mess, and a lengthy jail sentence. Better then if you can find a game that combines the best bits of each and play that instead. May I suggest Naughty Ones?

You ramble about the single screen arenas zapping baddies with your lightning bolt laser gun, or outing their innards with grenades. In between, switches must be flipped to activate lifts or open up gaps in walls, before locating the exit key and vamoosing to the next stage.

That's it in a nutshell. Quite the classic gaming throwback considering it was released in March 1994, and also tweaked to run on the more advanced AGA chipset. Which is perfectly fine if that's the show you've bought your ticket to see. Claiming to be "One of the most spectacular platformers of all time" through the medium of box cover marketing

hyperbole was perhaps a bit of a stretch. An unnecessary one at that, unless it was intended to be tongue in cheek.

Surprisingly there's also a distinct lack of delinquency or debauchery involved, making the title a solid contender for a Trade Descriptions Act lawsuit. ;)

What's more interesting is that it was developed by Melon Dezign, best known for their subtly stylish demo scene credentials, and for producing animated intros for various cracking groups. None of the magazine articles published at the time pointed out the connection, which suggests to me that either they knew little of the demo/cracking scene, or the great Danes themselves had asked the critics not to mention it for fear of being stigmatised. Often these worlds

would collide, though it was unusual for recognisable names to be attached to the cross-pollination, so to speak.

Naughty Ones is unmistakably a Melon Dezign creation what with its beautifully minimalist aesthetics courtesy of Henrik Lund Mikkelsen, and perfectly paired soundtrack composed by Martin de Agger and Allan Abildgaard Kirkeby. A collection of tunes that one magazine went to great lengths to convince us are the most irritating ditties ever to accompany a computer game. I don't get it personally; maybe if you were stuck on the first level for two hours the opening loop might start to get under your skin. Otherwise, the arrangements are pleasantly head-boppy in a cute, trippy kind of way.

At least Melon knew who they were, even if the magazines *didn't*, and were prepared to use their notoriety to curry favour with the cracking groups. If you dig into the source code of their first foray into gaming you'll find the following plea...

> "Sorry guys. No time for a proper protection. Have mercy!.. Melon Dezign did a lot for the scene, so please

> give us a break. No challenge in breaking this one anyways...
>
> PS: We were NEVER paid to make an intro for anyone, but maybe you will reward us by not cracking/spreading this one... OK??
>
> PPS: Just spend my last money buying a mobilephone, so I really need every dime this game can make... Merry Xmas everyone, seeing you around... [PALEFACE]"

Their appeal for clemency fell on deaf ears as it happens; the game was distributed regardless, and not just officially via Interactivision. Paradox and Kingdom made available the AGA and OCS iterations respectively. Ironically PDX were a division of Crystal; the group with which Melon first aligned themselves following their genesis in October 1991.

PARADOX
Mb
/\/ Mess With The Best ..... Die Like The Rest ! /\/
Presents:
Naughty One AGA From Interactivision
Supplied by: PDX FRANCE [.:.] Cracked by: E.F.A.
If you are searching for console copiers or for modems then make sure
to contact MAXiMiLiEN on any of the PaRaDoX BBS coming up next screen

Whilst the disks weren't protected from duplication in any way, an awkward to photocopy code sheet was packaged with the product. You'd have to refer to this whenever

booting the game to match on-screen pictures to names of baddies as a primitive, legitimate purchase check. Pirates would, of course, be able to skip the procedure.

If you dread having to wade through a complex, meandering backstory before diving into action games, you'll be relieved to hear that Naughty Ones isn't accompanied by a novel-length premise, fleshed out with convoluted character development.

Twins Jim and John have just been discharged from school for their summer holiday and trundle off to the park to play with their rubber balls while they deliberate over who to tease next. Hence the 'naughty' in the title. I don't think Melon were shooting for euphemisms of any kind. It *wasn't* written by Dominik Diamond. Anyway, that would just be inappropriate, and weird.

ON A SUNNY AFTERNOON, THE TWO NAUGHTY BROTHERS, JOHN & JIM, WERE PLAYING WITH THEIR RUBBERBALLS IN THE FIELDS NEAR THEIR HOME...

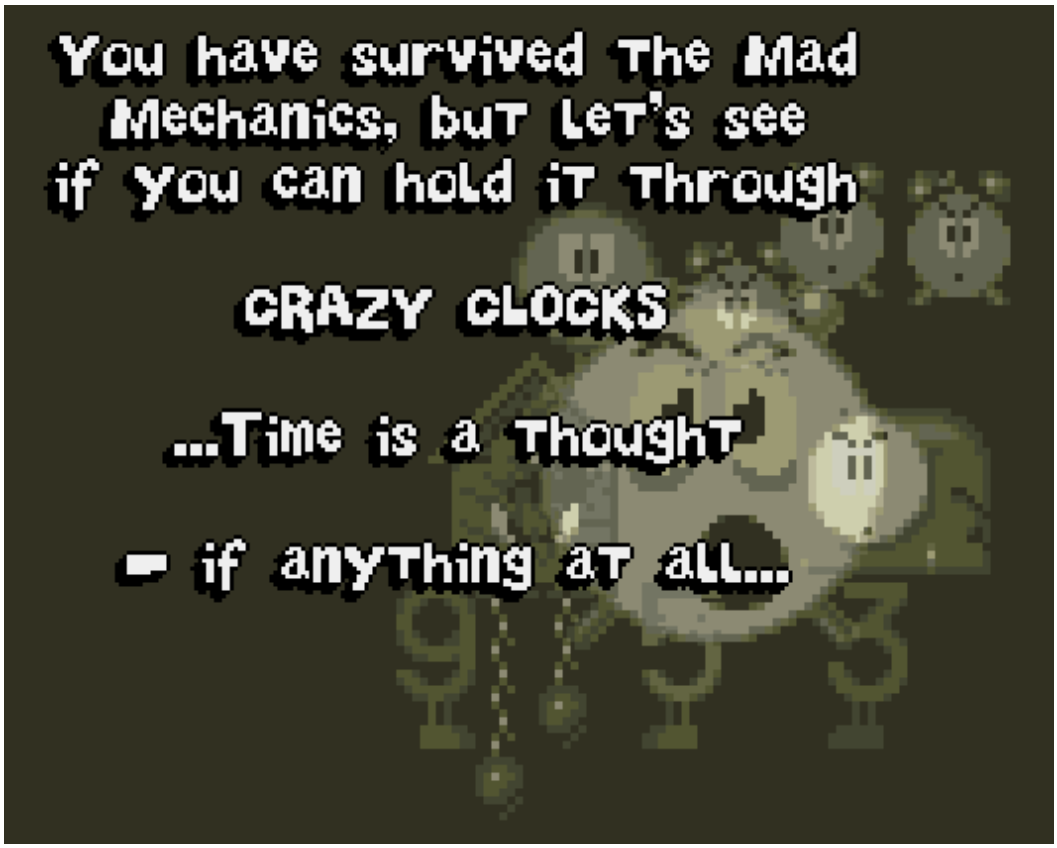
Before they can ponder "who turned out the lights?", an alien pillar of light yoinks them into the sky and off to another dimension.

BUT ALL OF A SUDDEN THE SKY DARKENED, THE BIRDS STOPPED SINGING, AND A CHILLY WIND SWEEPED OVER THE LANDSCAPE.

A POWERFUL BEAM LIT UP EVERYTHING AROUND THEM, AND GRAVITY SEEMED TO CHANGE DIRECTION...

It's your task to rescue the mischievous double act and defeat an evil king who is mentioned in the printed manual, though not the on-screen intro where all this unravels.

Our protagonists being brothers, Naughty Ones is optionally a two-player game. One that works particularly well because there's no scrolling involved, and hence no need to stagger your progress by trailing behind the slowest player.


You have survived The Mad Mechanics, but let's see if you can hold it through
CRAZY CLOCKS
...Time is a thought
- if anything at all...

Either way, there are five separate worlds to explore comprising 50 levels in total, distributed across themed zones such as Mad Mechanics, Crazy Clocks, Furious Fire, Foreign Affairs, and Evil Egypt.

'Foreign Affairs' struck me as particularly interesting because it features the queen's 'Beefeaters', officially known as The Yeomen Warders of Her Majesty's Royal Palace. Snappy title, eh.

You what? They're supposed to be Russians? Oh, feel free to ignore me. This level actually revolves around the 'Red Threat', Matryoshka dolls and so on. It says so on the back of the box. We'd left the Cold War behind us at this point so I don't know what the inspiration for any of this was.

Russia crops up later too where we face the teddy boss who lobs Tetris blocks at us. It seems Melon had quite an affinity for the classic puzzler judging by their famous Game Boy/Tetris intro.

Up until this point the music revolves around synthesised pianos and reed instruments. All of a sudden it switches to a piece that appears to have been inspired by the piratey shenanigans of Monkey Island. It says 'mystery and intrigue on the high-seas' to me. I suppose though it could also translate to 'Look at those scary Russians. Bet *they're* up to no good.'

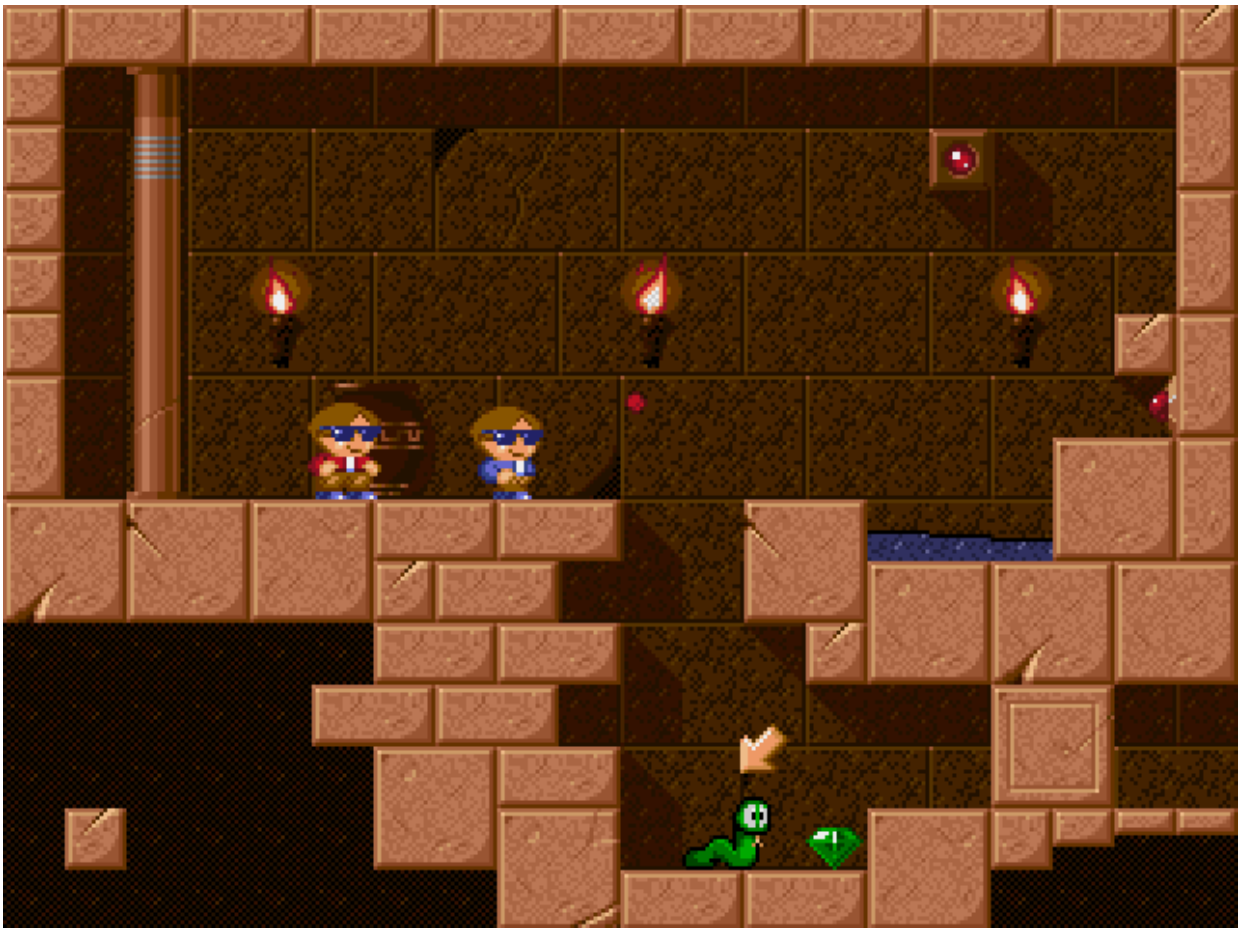
Anyone criticising the Naughty Ones soundtrack can't have reached the 'Foreign Affairs' level or they'd soon change *their* tune, *not* this one. Mark 'TDK' Knight who lent his musical panache to Melon's demos wasn't involved here. Martin and Allan who took his place do an admirable job, however.

Posting on the EAB forum Mark provides some insight into his involvement with the revered demo group behind Naughty Ones, who unsurprisingly now work in the media industry...

> "As for the music. I just churned the tracks out left right and centre, and they used what they wanted to. I never got to see the intro before, and sometimes, not even afterwards. The only one where I had a brief of any kind, was the Tetris intro... obviously."

In contrast, when it came to syncing the visuals with the audio for Melon's first platformer, the approach was far less arbitrary. In Egypt, in particular, it's a perfect companion to

the theme and atmosphere. Even *without* the visuals, you'd know where you were.



On this - as well as the other four worlds - our goal is to reach the exit by manipulating the scenery. Racking up bonus points determined by how you go about this can be considered an optional side quest.

Arrows appear over the heads of baddies to indicate the order in which to dispatch them to accrue maximum points. You can choose to ignore this completely, or evade non-highlighted adversaries, risking life and limb to leap over them to hit the target. If you find the main aim unchallenging this is certainly one way to extend the game's longevity and add a dash of nuance. Curiously, even the end of world bosses are flagged with arrows when they're the only thing

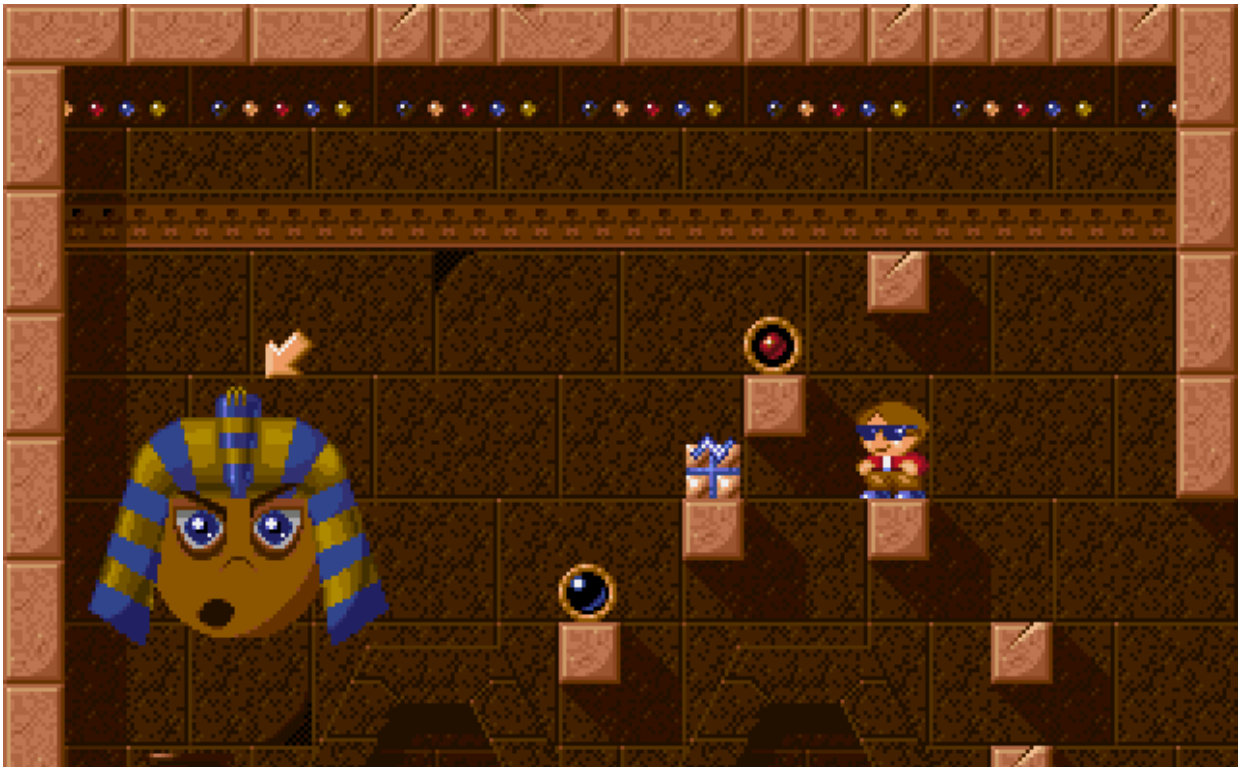
on-screen at the time. I probably could have guessed what to do in these situations on my own.

Another opportunity to boost your score comes in the form of a collect 'em up screen where all the objects are located beneath hovering platforms that descend when hopped on. You must knock each of them downwards a bit at a time, switching between them to keep the platforms roughly in alignment. This ensures that you don't push one so far down that you can no longer reach the next. It's not at all difficult, really just an exercise in patience for repetitive tasks. Personally I'd rather skip the fruit and sweets and get on with the next level.

There are no continues, and passwords aren't an option so you must complete the whole game in one sitting if you're to reach the end. This isn't *that* tricky as long as you have the restraint to watch the patterns of enemy movements before storming in. They all manoeuvre along fixed paths so won't spring any surprises to catch you off guard. It's much like Rick Dangerous in that regard (one of coder Jacob's two favourite games); all about memorising positions and behaviour patterns whilst ensuring your timing and aim is impeccable. Only one grenade can be lobbed at once so if you miss you'll need to dodge out of the way until it has exploded before trying again. Still, it's nothing like as frustrating or mean-spirited as the stunted Indy Jones parody from Core Design.

While Naughty Ones comes in three flavours - ECS, AGA and CD32 - there's very little difference between them. One has 32 colours, the others have 64, and up is always jump, even with a CD32 joypad. You enter your name in the high score table using the joystick and fire button suggesting that Melon intended to design a single version that would require little adaptation between systems. That would explain the game entirely ignoring the keyboard.

We wind down in a spat with Tutankhamen, or at least his levitating head. With the pharaoh sent packing, the game ends in a transition to a single static screen, which, wait for it, reads 'The End'. An abrupt conclusion to what is otherwise a very elegant, competently constructed game. One that's improved immensely by responsive, dependable controls courtesy of coder Jacob Gorm Hansen.



I'm not sure what the rush to get Naughty Ones to market was. It's not a licensed tie-in game, and at least in the UK didn't hit the shelves until two or three months after Christmas, despite the festive greeting in the source code. Maybe there were delays at the publishing stage, or Melon knew there had been a leak to the cracking groups and had to move fast to maximise sales?

Naughty Ones didn't, in fact, hit the charts at all. Then perhaps we wouldn't really expect it to; rather than a triple-A blockbuster, it's a budget game released at a premium price, about eight years after this sort of gameplay first became popular. Not that there's anything at all wrong with retro-style games. Even the ones that were retro when they were current.

the end